

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO THE SOUTH SHORE ESTUARY RESERVE COUNCIL

Draft CAC Meeting Minutes

January 14, 2020

7:00-9:00 p.m.

Seatuck Environmental Center

550 South Bay Ave, Islip, NY 11751

Present:

Judi Bird, League of Women Voters Brookhaven
Maureen Dunn, Seatuck Association
Emily Hall, Seatuck Association
Arielle Santos, Seatuck Association
Sally Kellogg, NYS DOS/Reserve Office
Rachel Neville, NYS DOS/Reserve Office
Jeremy Campbell, NYS DOS/Reserve Coordinator
Maureen Dolan Murphy, Chair CAC/Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Lane Smith, Chair TAC/NY Sea Grant
Erich Dietterle, Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)
Kyle Rabin, LI Regional Planning Council/LINAP and Friends of the South Shore Blueway
Lesley Kane, Islip Town Leaseholders Association
David Schape, NY Seafood Council
Artie Kopelman, Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island (CRESLI)
Marshall Brown, Save the Great South Bay

1. Introductions

M. Dolan Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. and introductions were made. Congratulations were offered to A. Kopelman on behalf of his retirement.

2. Whale Stranding 2019 Re-cap

M. Murphy introduced E. Dietterle from Atlantic Marine Conservation Society and A. Kopelman from CRESLI. E. Dietterle stated there were 261 stranding responses which includes only deceased animals. This is a record number of strandings since 1980, when data was initially taken. Seals, particularly Harb Seals, are the largest percentage of strandings but Sea Turtles and Cetaceans are also a component of that number. 15 Large whales were stranded and 1 of which was an endangered North American Right Whale. Suspected human interaction was a contributor to the total deaths which includes vessel strikes, fishing gear entanglements and marine debris ingestion. AMCS is the primary first responder for live and dead whales. After a necropsy is performed on whales they are typically then buried on the beach. AMCS coordinates and corresponds with many groups including NOAA, towns, etc. to make this all happen.

Question: M. Murphy: Do you think recreational boaters are keeping enough distance? Or do they trail the whale?

Answer: A. Kopelman: Sometimes boaters will trail the whale, but it is rare, boaters may be fishing near bunker or doing their own thing and the whale surprises them.

Question: D. Schape: Could you provide background more background and context for these numbers?

Answer: E. Dietterle: 15 is a very big number for whale stranding's. Between 1980 and 2017 there was a large whale stranding about every 600 days on average. Now it is up to 1 stranding every 27 days in the past 3 years.

The responsibility for whale disposal is on the land owner. AMCS collects data and investigates into what happened to the animals. Burial locations of whales are not shared. The land owners typically use lime to cover the smell of the deceased whale.

Question: M. Dunn: Do the towns have a policy on disposal?

Answer: E. Dietterle: AMCS can advise them on options. Due to safety issues and logistical issues whales are usually buried as opposed to towing out to sea an 80,000-pound animal.

Question: L. Smith: Is there research on deterring whales from boats?

Answer: A. Kopelman: Yes and no. Not for large whales but for smaller cetaceans and seals.

Answer: E. Dietterle: There was research to see if Right Whales are more likely to see certain colors better underwater. That was a few years ago and there maybe more information available now.

AMCS is increasing awareness and outreach efforts to educate people about what is going in their backyard to protect these animals including promoting the awareness of speed limit restrictions, some people do not know that it is illegal to be within 150ft of a marine mammal or sea turtle, but it is 500 yards from a North American Right Whale. Whales are coming closer to shore than ever before and thus overlapping more with areas that humans are in.

3. Seal Walks/Watch 2020

M. Dolan Murphy introduced A. Kopelman. A. Kopelman said this the 16th year monitoring for seals at Cupsogue Beach. A total of 21,944 seal encounters have occurred over the past 16 years. Starting in 2009 A. Kopelman lead seal walks to educate people about seals and their conservation and protection efforts, last year there were 1,090 reservations made. Over the course of 35 surveys and average of 78 seals per encounter. Seal walks occur during low tide when seals should be on the sand bar. Primarily Harbor Seals are sighted, generally the number of seal sights has been increasing with dips that correspond with heavy dredging activities. This year over the course of 9 sightings there have been a total of 783 seal encounters. Most seals surveyed are Harbor Seals with occasional Grey Seals spotted and at rare moments Harp Seals and Hooded Seals. A. Kopelman sited that this is the longest continuous study haul out site in the east coast. The main issue is that some members of the public disturb the seals and get too

close. A. Kopelman encouraged anyone who sees this to take a video and send to DEC Environmental Conservation Officers. The seal walks have been included in the Reserve Office newsletter. Meeting spot is at Cupsogue Beach and it is preferred that people make online reservations before attending. Walks are typically on Saturday's and Sunday mornings.

4. 2020 Budget

a. Support letter for \$1.5 million SSER Funding in EPF

M. Murphy updated CAC on the current SSER line item which is funded at \$900,000 from the EPF. In November 2019 the Friends of the EPF Coalition had proposed to advocate for a \$350 million EPF, current funding is at \$300 million, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment wanted to increase the SSER line item to \$1.5 million. {NOTE: M. Murphy conducted follow-up with CAC members and ultimately the letter requesting \$1 Million in funding for the program.} The SSER line item has not been increased since its inception. M. Murphy suggested that the CAC draft a letter to support the increased budget and increased SSER line item.

b. State-wide Environmental Bond Act

In the Governor's state of the state address, he announced a \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act. M. Murphy conveyed that a \$350 million EPF is less probable to pass considering the new Environmental Bond Act but still encouraged the CAC to still write a letter of support to increase the SSER line item if the EPF levels are increased. This will put the CAC in a favorable position to have projects included in the Environmental Bond Act. A letter of support promoting the importance of the SSER sets the stage to increase the EPF line item and/or to have projects included in the Environmental Bond Act.

*** Letter of Support**

Motion by M. Murphy, to write letter of support to increase the SSER line item in the EPF; seconded by M. Brown, carried.

J. Campbell recapped that the last Environmental Bond Act from 1996 was \$1.75 billion with money earmarked for the Peconic Estuary and the South Shore Estuary. M. Murphy emphasized that the previous Bond Act stressed open space preservation while this one will focus on clean water projects.

Question: M. Dunn: Should one letter be sent from the group or several letters from supporting groups be sent?

Answer: M. Murphy: One letter from the CAC.

M. Murphy summarized that CAC should advocate for increasing the SSER line item if there is a \$350 million EPF but we will be supportive of the \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act and ask for funding to come to the SSER.

Question: L. Smith: Can Bond Act funds support the EPF?

Answer: M. Murphy: No. The bond act funding is separate from EPF funding.

K. Rabin commented that if there is a sample letter circulated LIRPC may be interested in submitting an additional letter of support.

Question: A. Kopelman: Who makes the decisions about how the money allocated?

Answer: M. Murphy: When the governor announces his budget there will be language that describes what will be covered including how it will be divided and then the Senate and the Assembly will do the same in their budgets. Then the three most come together and agree on language.

5. South Shore Estuary Reserve Stewardship Award

M. Murphy recap the Stewardship Award. She thanked Captain Mike Eagan for donating the use of his boat and complimented his excellent navigation skills. The weather held off until the event was concluding. Honorees were Carl Lobue, The Nature Conservancy, and Karen Marvin, South Shore Paddleboards. She thanked M. Dunn for finding the awards and S. Kellogg and R. Neville for obtaining the awards, and to all for assisting in a great event. The 2020 award applications should need minimal if any updating, the due date for submissions should be July 2020. A. Kopelman volunteer to be a part of the subcommittee, M. Brown and A. DePerte confirmed their continued participation in the subcommittee however L. Kane has stepped down.

*** Minutes, September 10, 2019**

Motion by M. Brown, to approve the September 10, 2019 CAC meeting minutes; seconded by M. Dunn, carried. A. Kopelman abstain.

6. Jeremy Campbell, South Shore Estuary Reserve Office

J. Campbell introduced the NYS DOS Information Gateway and defined it as a way for the public to access GIS coverages. Focus pages have been added to the Gateway to highlight specific programs, one of which is the South Shore Estuary Reserve. The programs will have stories to discuss specific elements, the first story for the Reserve is about shellfish. The focus pages and stories should increase the SSER web presence. J. Campbell ask the CAC for feedback on the story. R. Neville ran through the shellfish story and noted comments. J. Campbell said the story would be reviewed by subject matter experts including Cornell Cooperative Extension, members of CAC, Council and TAC to be vetted before releasing to the public.

J. Campbell announce that the next Council meeting will be spring 2020. L. Smith recap the December 2019 TAC meeting stating presentations were given on the Suffolk County Subwatershed plan and Seatuck Bellmore Creek fish passage grant. M. Murphy clarify that the TAC climate vulnerability assessment letter will help define restoration goals and what will be prioritized within the Reserve. L. Smith commented that that climate vulnerability assessment will help focus efforts for 2020 and the TAC is collected suggestion for projects. The next TAC meeting is February 4, 2020.

7. Public Comment/Announcements

Marshall Brown – SGSB speaker series, Creeks as Classrooms, will be on 2/7 at The View with speakers including Artie Kopelman, Mel Morris, Lou Siegel, and John Dolan. In honor of the 50th

anniversary of Earth Day there will be 50 creek cleanups in 50 creeks for the Creek Defenders program.

Lesley Kane – The Bay houses exhibit is currently at the Islip library.

Kyle Rabin – Announced that the QAPP for the LINAP water quality monitoring is official and data is currently being collected. The December LINAP newsletter has links with further information about this project. The January newsletter will focus on aquaculture.

Emily Hall – Alewife monitoring training has been scheduled with the first one occurring on February 25 at the Rockville Center Library. E. Hall will send the schedule to M. Murphy who will then distribute to the CAC.

Maureen Dunn – The Natural History Conference is being sponsored by Seatuck and will be on March 20 and March 21. On January 20 there will be an invasive weeds removal at the First Baptist Church. The winter waterfowl count is January 19, and the wild Scenic film festival will be in April.

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.